

Protecting biodiversity must be a key principle of the EU's Recovery Plan



In this interview, [Roby Biber \(LU/PES\)](#), Member of Bettembourg Municipal Council, answers five questions on the importance of biodiversity in preventing a new pandemic outbreak, tackling climate change and in achieving greater sustainability through the EU's Recovery Plan. Roby Biber is the rapporteur of the opinion [Bio-diverse cities and regions beyond 2020](#), to be adopted at the next plenary session in October. The opinion puts forward the contribution of local and regional authorities to the [EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030](#) presented by the European Commission on 20 May 2020. Moreover, the CoR will defend the key role that local and regional authorities play in biodiversity protection at the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Parties of the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity ([UN CBD COP15](#)), that will take place from 17 to 30 May 2021 in Kunming, China.

The COVID-19 pandemic reshaped the political agenda all around the world. How has the outbreak affected your work as a rapporteur of the opinion on biodiversity beyond 2020?

COVID-19 has indeed affected the opinion on biodiversity. The pandemic has raised awareness of the topic not only among experts but also among citizens. They now understand that such calamities most often have their origin in inadequate and perverse use of biodiversity as a resource for mankind's own egoistic desires. Moreover, people recognised that healthy ecosystems with intact biodiversity are a guarantee for our own health and destiny. The origin of about 80% of diseases lies in wildlife and the transmission from exotic animals to humans is more and more likely. Therefore, it is crucial to preserve nature and biodiversity for our own sake. Our own health depends on this balance.

Is there any role for biodiversity in the post COVID-19 crisis and the EU's Recovery Plan?

Yes, indeed. Human resources and public investments must be predominant in the post COVID-19 period. These policies will generate numerous green jobs and they will considerably enhance the natural environment and the resilience of ecosystems. Biodiversity plays a crucial role in human well-being and in so many other areas. Bending the biodiversity loss curve needs to become a key principle in distributing resources through all major financial plans such as the EU's Recovery Plan. We cannot go back to tolerating or even subsidising activities that undermine our health, our food supply and livelihoods by degrading or destroying our precious ecosystems and their functions. This means mobilising sufficient resources to, directly or indirectly, stimulate biodiversity actions at all levels of government,

simplifying procedures to make funding more accessible and make biodiversity a non-negotiable value in policy and economic activities across sectors. It seems that awareness on preservation and restoration of ecosystems has risen considerably and investments in biodiversity are increasingly expected by our citizens. Local and regional authorities are best positioned to implement these policies and mobilise citizens.

How would you summarise to the European Commissioner for Environment Virginijus Sinkevičius the key elements of the CoR opinion you are working on compared to the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030?

I believe that the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 published by the European Commission is ambitious. However, more and faster action is needed to tackle this global biodiversity crisis and we need appropriate tools and sufficient resources to restore our ecosystems. Biodiversity must in no way be a victim of "old-school" economic considerations and it should be the motor of the EU's Recovery Plan. The Commission should use the full potential and unique position of local and regional authorities to help implement the new Biodiversity Strategy for 2030.

On 30 September the UN Summit on Biodiversity will take place in New York. This will be a key global event to demonstrate ambition in view of the adoption of an effective post-2020 global biodiversity framework at the UN CBD COP15. What are the key messages that you wish UN Parties to bring home?

Despite the increasing acknowledgement of the key role of subnational governments in bending the biodiversity loss curve, formal recognition and vertical collaboration is still lacking within global governance frameworks. Moreover, local and subnational governments need to be involved in each step and at every level of the biodiversity governance process, both on a global and national scale. This would entail:

- 1) each national plan delineating, whenever possible, a subnational plan for governments below the national level;
- 2) ensuring mobilisation of sufficient resources that includes subnational governments in collection and distribution of resources;
- 3) including subnational governments in the development and implementation of monitoring, evaluation and feedback mechanisms;
- 4) ensuring a long-term approach to mainstreaming biodiversity that is based on vertical and horizontal collaboration;
- 5) giving subnational governments a clear role in the convergence of biodiversity with other agendas (e.g. climate, Sustainable Development Goals);
- 6) strengthening alliances and networks that support subnational governments.

Imagine that after the vote on your opinion in October, you go back home and need to explain to children in school what you did in Brussels. What you would tell them?

I would say that I helped make powerful people understand the importance of the environment and the need to protect our plants and animals. This is to make sure that they, their children and grandchildren can enjoy the beauties of this planet in a sustainable way. I would tell them that I tried to help preserve biodiversity and restore degraded ecosystems, and that “turbo-capitalism” is the wrong way forward because it does not provide any guarantees of proper nature and quality of life in the future.

Background

Last year’s [Eurobarometer 481/2019](#) shows that EU citizens are increasingly concerned about the state of the natural world. The overwhelming majority of Europeans (96%) said that we have a responsibility to look after nature and that this is essential in tackling climate change. According to a recent [territorial impact assessment](#), 61% of EU regions will be very highly affected by the post-2020 biodiversity framework.

The CoR works in partnership with the [Advisory Committee on Subnational Governments and Biodiversity \(AC SNG\) to the UN CBD](#) and other key organisations and stakeholders such as [ICLEI](#) and [Regions4](#) to bring the voice of cities, regions and all other forms of subnational governments to the attention of the global biodiversity agenda towards the [UN CBD COP15 in 2021](#).

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